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SUBJECT: MOZAMBIQUE: SIX MEN ARRESTED FOR ALLEGED
TRAFFICKING OF 43 PERSONS

¶1. (U) Summary. On Friday, February 17, Mozambican police stopped two minivans on the EN4 highway linking Mozambique and South Africa, arresting six men allegedly involved in a plan to traffic 43 persons to South Africa. After being held for questioning in Maputo, the 43 individuals, including two women and four children, were returned to their homes in Manica and Sofala provinces on February 22. PolOff was able to interview many of them before their departure. End summary.

¶2. (U) Through conversations with police and victims, PolOff pieced together a story that begins in the impoverished, rural bush (in the provinces of Manica and Sofala), where a recruiter from the capital city Maputo promised victims employment in South Africa. He charged those who could pay 600,000 meticaís each (the equivalent of \$24) for the journey. Those who couldn't afford the fee were told they could work off their debt once they arrived in South Africa. The 43 individuals were driven to Maputo and held in a transit house and prevented from leaving for two days. On Friday, in two minivans, they left Maputo for the border under the cover of night, but were pulled over at a routine police checkpoint at 2300 hours. The police found that none of the 43 possessed any identity documents, and as the border post was closed, concluded the alleged traffickers were planning to cross the border illegally.

¶3. (U) The children's ages ranged from seven to 16. At the police station, they sat quietly among the adults, looking afraid and shying away from questions. A man who claimed to be the uncle of two of the children said he was taking the kids to attend school in South Africa, but the police dismissed this as implausible. Police informed PolOff that the six men arrested included the two drivers and four "handlers." One man known as "Arlindo," whom police identify as a key figure in the organized network, is still at large. Police hope that information gleaned from this case will lead to further breakthroughs in detecting other trafficking networks.

¶4. (U) Comment: This latest case demonstrates a significant success in anti-trafficking efforts in that the police were able to identify a trafficking situation, move swiftly to make appropriate arrests, gather information to begin an investigation, call on two local NGOs for victims' assistance which was quickly provided, and repatriate the victims without undue delay. The GRM faces significant challenges as it tries to tackle the country's complex trafficking problem, which is rooted in desperate poverty and a long history of migration to the mines and farms of South Africa (former President Chissano's father worked in South Africa's mines). With several thousand kilometers of porous land borders, Mozambique is known as both a source and transit country for trafficking in persons. People are trafficked primarily for labor or sexual exploitation.

Sometimes the trafficked are dumped back over the border again; we hear of Mozambican children and young adults who, after months of working illegally on South African farms, are turned over to the immigration police by their "employers," who have failed to pay them for their work and who claim to have never seen them before. End comment.

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